

January 20, 2008
Houghton Lake UMC

“In Praise of God for What He Does”

Psalm 19

Many of us live lives at 90 miles an hour. We might be out of breath as we come to the worship service this morning, out of breath, and we need a good spiritual fill up. So, today I want to provide for you a time for reflection and a time to praise God for what He does.

Our text today, Psalm 19, helps us to do just that -- to slow down, to meditate, to quiet our hearts and to look in God’s direction. Psalm 19 is a psalm of King David, and I have a picture that comes to my mind every time I read this Psalm.....

It is summer time on a warm, cloudless night, and David is sitting on the roof of his house. When it’s hot in the near east, the rooftop is the place many people choose to sleep. He looks up in the sky and sees the majesty of the Milky Way galaxy before him in all of its glory. The stars are so bright that you feel you could just reach out and touch one. The moon is also in the sky and the night is very peaceful and still—no wind tonight, no enemies to fear, no emotions to conquer; just quiet, still reflection. He opens up his heart to God, Who has obviously provided this wondrous view, and we are allowed to join David on this evening of meditation. He thinks to himself, “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.” David knew that God was with him, all around him, and yet way up there as well. God was the creator of all that he could see, and David was certain as well that God had created all that he could not see. But, before him was an array that took his breath away and put him into song. And then He thought, “you know, the stars and all that I can see right now,... ‘Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge.’” God is making a

witness of Himself in all that He has made. God shows the world that He is present; God shows His power, wisdom, majesty, and knowledge every night in the heavens. “They pour forth speech, and there is no speech or language where their voice is not heard.” The stars do not need a translator. Every heart that looks to the sky receives God’s message and “their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.” That was a deep insight by the poet, and I can imagine that David thought about that for a while. There is God, witnessing to the world every day, day after day, night after night, through the things that He has made. And God does it in such a steady, quiet, wonderful way—a way that allows us humans to discover His presence and majesty on our own.

Then David thinks of the sun. “In the heavens God has pitched a tent for the sun, which is like a bridegroom coming forth from his pavilion, like a champion rejoicing to run his course.” It is a simile, a word picture that David and his contemporaries would know from their experience. The sun traveling from coast to coast never tired; and was always on time, in one steady, predictable orbit through the sky. David presumes that he is sitting in one place and watching the sun race across the sky. “It rises at one end of the heavens and makes its circuit to the other; nothing is hidden from its heat.” The sun influences everything on the earth, and David knew full well the power of its heat. The desert forces everyone to hide from the sun at its brightest point in the day. But, tonight he reflects on the sun as a champion rejoicing to run his course. It was something the sun was created to do. David thinks about that for sometime as he gazes into the night sky, and I can imagine how perfect all of this majesty was .

After some time his thoughts move to another thing that impacts his life. He begins to think about the law of the Lord. It was written by Moses long before David’s

day and passed down to him by generation after generation of scribes and priests who copied it over on scrolls. And David had access to the law, read and reflected on it often, and now tonight he begins to make comparisons from the sun in the sky to the law of the Lord.

“The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple.” This was David’s own experience. He spent personal time reading and reflecting on the law of the Lord and he had found the law to be like the sun; it revived his soul, it influenced his life, and it made even the simple person wise. It was one more thing that God had given to David that was perfect and trustworthy in a time of uncertainty and doubt. “The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart.” I can see David smile to himself as these thoughts come into his mind. He thinks further along these lines and more words come to him to describe how precious the law had become to him. “The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes.” The law and the sun had many things in common. “The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the Lord are sure and altogether righteous.”

How valuable the sun is. How valuable the law is. How valuable God’s statutes, His ordinances and commands, “they are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.” This was the compass of his life. This was the lighthouse of David’s soul, the guardian of his thinking, his judgment, his safety and his sense of well-being. And David was very grateful. He realized that he had access not only to God’s presence, but he understood God’s witness in the stars and he knew the law of God that was also perfect, right, and priceless. God had, indeed, done all things perfectly.

Then David, on his rooftop, asks the question, “Who can discern his errors?” God is so majestic, so far above our understanding, who could possibly detect God’s mistakes? And, of course, the answer is “no one”. At that very moment David becomes aware of himself and he is humbled by all he is seeing and thinking about. He looks again at the expanse of the sky before him, and in comparison to God’s obvious perfection David is faced with his own sinfulness. There is no comparison between God and us—even though we are made in His image. How dare we even try to make that kind of comparison? Our sin is before us in glaring florescent orange, literally glowing in the dark. David’s immediate reaction is to turn to God in repentance. “Forgive my hidden faults.” Forgive those sins of which I am not even aware. Forgive me for the things I tried to do but failed. Forgive me for my missed attempts to hit the mark. David’s song turns into a prayer: “Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me.” How that prayer should be on all of our lips, because we know how our sins can take control and destroy what good we’ve done or are trying to do. How we need God to free us from the sins that so easily beset us and cause damage to our lives and relationships. David knew full well what sin had done to King Saul, who lost the very treasures David received. King Saul was David’s constant example of mistakes and failure, and that is why King Saul is so prominent in the scriptures. David prays that he won’t make the same mistakes: “Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me. Then will I be blameless, innocent of great transgression.” Here we see David’s heart, his mind at work, his quick turn to prayer, and his true desire. David wanted to be blameless before God and innocent of any great transgression. David did not want God to have to tear the kingdom from his hands. David wanted more than anything else to remain in a

right relationship with God, to be the man God wanted him to be. David wanted to be blameless before God, but he knew that God had to help him. So his greatest prayer, his most powerful words came next: “May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.”

The witness of the stars in the sky and the work of God’s law in his heart and mind led David to pray on this most wonderful starry night that God would guide the words of his mouth and the thoughts in his mind, so that everything in his being would please the Lord. God was the rock of his salvation, the sure foundation of his life, and he would trust God to redeem him from the sin that he knew was always close at hand.

And so on this wonderful, starlit night David penned a prayer that is powerful and personal. They are words we should memorize and pray often. “May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.” May it be our prayer daily as we seek to glorify God in thought, word, and deed. And may we live our lives in praise of God for what He does! Amen.